

Review:

Mary Jo Reiff, Anis Bawarshi, Michelle Ballif, and Christian Weisser. *The Ecologies of Writing Programs: Program Profiles in Context*

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Writing program administration was once an area within rhetoric and composition where little research emerged due to misperceptions about the viability of research and the availability of time for research. Fortunately, more and more quality scholarship is being brought forth by WPAs centered around the writing programs they serve, such as that found within *Ecologies of Writing Programs: Program Profiles in Context*, which has some of the leading researchers in the field as editors: Mary Jo Reiff, Anis Bawarshi, Michelle Ballif, and Christian Weisser.

The essays and research in *Ecologies* support the theory posited by the editors: that writing programs are ecologies in and of themselves. They fully explain in the opening chapter by noting “They [writing programs] are not just *like* ecologies, nor are they simply useful metaphoric examples of ecologies. They are ecologies themselves, in every sense of the word” (4). The term is a fittingly appropriate description to describe writing programs

considering the “...interconnectedness, fluctuation, complexity, and emergence” (5) found within them.

To establish writing programs as ecologies, it is necessary to first put them into context. The editors do this by utilizing essays about writing programs that were published in *Composition Forum* in the “Program Profiles” section. The authors of the selected essays updated their work with a “Where We Are Now” section. In the Introduction, they note that the essays, on their own, tell individual stories “... but collected, framed, and organized in the following collection, they reveal the larger ecologies that influence and are influenced by writing programs” (16). The addition of the update coupled with the organization of the text present a firm case for writing programs as ecologies.

The editors organize the text into five sections whose labels offer a preview of what that section will discuss. The headings include: “The Contested Ecologies of FYC Programs: Negotiating Between Stability and Change”; “Remapping Interdisciplinary Ecologies: WAC and WID Programs”; “Claiming Disciplinary Locations: The Undergraduate Major in Rhetoric and Composition”; “Interconnected Sites of Agency: Situating Assessment with Institutional Ecologies” and “Third Spaces: Creating Liminal Ecologies.” These section headings present the ecological nature and interconnected concepts that will be found between the essays in each section. In dividing the essays in such a clear, logical manner, readers can quickly understand and access relevant sections.

In the first section “The Contested Ecologies of FYC Programs: Negotiating Between Stability and Change,” there are three essays based on writing programs from Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IUPUFW), Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), and the University of Central Florida (UCF) respectively. If one were to read each piece individually, they would be presented with thorough profiles of these writing programs. When the essays are organized together under the framework of being ecologies and with the heading of “Negotiating Between Stability and Change,” the ecological nature, the interconnectedness, fluctuation, complexity, and emergence of writing programs becomes evident.

Within this particular section, the two profiles of IUPUFW and SIUC experience quite similar situations and outcomes whereas UCF has similar situations but a very different outcome. This speaks in part to differences within universities but also to the variations found in the role of Writing Program Administrators and their ability to affect change, power base, and how they have established and situated themselves within their universities.

Ecologies bridges the gap and provides context to the individual situations located in each program and examines the issue(s), the actions taken to affect change within the program, and updates the program today from the original authors. This kind of long-term research can be particularly helpful to *Reflections* readers about to embark on making significant changes within their own programs. Often, writing program administrators have difficulty establishing precedent on which to base the changes they are proposing. A text such as *Ecologies* and its contextual nature complete with follow-up, can serve as a helpful tool in quickly locating what other programs have experienced. In an effort to provide a broad range of issues, the editors have taken care to prevent diversity within their selections, and in doing so, firmly present the fluctuation and complexity in writing programs and writing program administration.

This book is recommended for anyone interested in the work and research of WPAs but could also serve as a course text in a graduate student classroom. For a writing program administrator, the text can be a basis for change or a reference point to understand what has been tried successfully or not so successfully before. This text connects to current research in the field and further legitimizes writing program administration research through the establishment of the ecological nature of writing programs. The editors of *Ecologies of Writing*

Programs: Program Profiles in Context have taken their original concept of contextualizing writing programs and establishing them as ecologies through their careful selection of essays, the efforts of the original authors to carefully update their essays, and thoughtful selection of groupings, making this a significant contribution to the field of writing program administration and writing program research.

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